



Name of Project:

The Healing Zone: Community Health and Advocacy Training Project

Name of Organization:

The National Caucus and Center on Black Aged, Inc., Washington, DC

Project Description:

In the spirit of the Administration on Aging's 2008 theme "Working Together for Strong, Healthy and Supportive Communities, the National Caucus and Center on Black Aged, Inc. is currently conducting a three year faith-based community leadership program entitled The Healing Zone: Community Health Action and Advocacy Training Project. Initially created as a pilot program in 2003, the overall goal of the Healing Zone is to reduce obesity and risk factors leading to chronic disease and death among African American seniors. The objectives of The Healing Zone are weight reduction, improved nutrition, increased physical activity, improved quality of life, and the establishment of church-based aging and health advocacy committees. NCBA is collaborating with GROUP Ministries in Baltimore, MD and Buffalo, NY, and the Area Agencies on Aging in Richmond, VA, Detroit MI, and Hinds County, MS.

The Healing Zone is based on the premise that by engaging the mind, the body, and the spirit, seniors will improve their health awareness. In collaboration with regional partners, churches and community organizations, the Healing Zone brings African American seniors together for eight weeks to participate in "Healing Circles". Led by trained peers (Senior Health Advocates), the Healing Circles aim to increase the participants' knowledge about self-care strategies to combat overweight and obesity; promote physical activities; encourage weight loss; and engage in health advocacy activities. Outside guest speakers, such as health care experts and academia are invited to present on different health-related topics. Spirituality and fellowship are intertwined with Healing Circles in the faith-based organizations.

Among the five sites that reported weight measurements for the first and eighth week, sixty-nine percent of the seniors lost weight after participation in the Healing Circles, with a net weight loss of 417.2 pounds. Three out of the five sites reduced the average systolic blood pressure of participating seniors with complete health data records. At the end of the eight weeks, there was an overall decrease in the number of obese participants and an increase in the number of those having a normal BMI.

In a country where obesity is on the rise for all ages, the National Caucus and Center on Black Aged continues to work under the assumption that education and prevention will lead to a healthier population. Based on the self-reported data and focus groups with senior participants, survey responses and interviews with Senior Health Advocates, pastors and partners, the Healing Zone has been hugely successful in raising the awareness of seniors about unhealthy lifestyle habits and how nutrition and exercise can reduce their risks for chronic disease. For more information on the Healing Zone Project, contact The National Caucus and Center on Black Aged, Inc. at 202-637-8400 or visit www.ncba-aged.org.

